



April 13, 2021

The Honorable Representative Marvin Abney
Chair of the House Finance Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Housing - Budget Article 16, H-5687 and H-5456

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island's support for Budget Article 16, House Bill 5687 and House Bill 5456, related to the pressing issue of housing. We respectfully urge this Committee to support these efforts to increase the availability of affordable housing in Rhode Island.

Housing is mental health. Housing is recovery. Housing is food security, education, and employment. In fact, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) considers the four pillars of recovery to be: health, home, purpose and community.¹ Safe, stable housing is the foundation of all the good things in our lives.

Rhode Island, like many other states, is experiencing a housing crisis. Tent encampments are popping up around the state. Wages are stagnant, and rents are ever growing and sky high. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, tenants must earn \$17.51/hour to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island.² According to the 2020 [HousingWorks RI Factbook](#), more than 67% of families who rent in Rhode Island earn less than 80 percent of the area median income — less than \$66,000 for a family of four.³ Many families are slipping into poverty. People who are poor are twice as likely to have common mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, compared to the rich. In fact, low-income populations are 1.5 to 2 times more likely to have depression.⁴

¹ <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery>

² <https://reports.nlihc.org/or/rhode-island>

³ https://www.housingworksri.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/HFB2020_web.pdf?ver=QcN9AL9v3lpRznsBKUEw6g%3d%3d

⁴ https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/development/1_Breakingviciouscycle_Infosheet.pdf



Mental Health Association of Rhode Island
An Affiliate of Mental Health America

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Housing is not just a financial matter; it is a human rights issue that profoundly affects people with disabilities. States that intend to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act must tend to their affordable housing stock because many people with disabilities, including serious and persistent mental illness, live on SSI / SSDI benefits or earn a low income. These individuals cannot afford overpriced rentals and are forced into homelessness or segregated, restrictive settings like nursing homes, prison/jail, or psychiatric facilities even though they are capable of living independently in the community. In addition to the human tragedy of it all, the unnecessary overutilization of expensive institutions is wasteful and counterproductive.

As you may know, Rhode Island is the only state in the region (including New England and NJ, NY and PA) without a dedicated funding stream for housing. A dedicated funding stream is necessary to make progress on our state's housing needs. **Doing nothing is not free.** We have to spend money now to save money in the long term.

The Mental Health Association of Rhode Island respectfully urges you to support this legislation, and to give people living with mental health disabilities the opportunity to live in safe, stable and affordable housing, instead of nursing homes, prison, or shelters. As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie-Marie Pisciotto".

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